

TO: American Indian Health Commission Members, Washington State Tribes and Indian Health Service
FROM: American Indian Health Commission Executive Committee
DATE: December 7, 2001 Discussion
SUBJECT: Ideas for a Sue Crystal Memorial and Joint American Indian Health Commission and Washington State Board of Health Meeting

On December 7th individuals from the American Indian Health Commission (AIHC), Washington State Board of Health (SBOH) and DSHS Indian Policy Advisory Committee met to discuss and plan a January 9, 2002 joint SBOH and AIHC meeting. Attending the meeting were: Joe Finkbonner, Marilyn Scott, Cindy Lowe, Marianne Seifert, Ed Fox, Rod Smith, Ralph Forquera, Gwen Gua, Crystal Tetrack and Kris Locke.

At the November AIHC meeting Senator Pat Thibaudeau described an interest on the part of herself and the legislature to honor the memory of Sue Crystal. Because of Sue's dedication to Tribal issues and her instrumental health policy work in Washington State, Senator Thibaudeau asked AIHC to identify potential legislative actions that would improve the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives in Washington. Because of the budget crisis facing the legislature this session, funding is extremely limited.

The State Board of Health is involved because eliminating health disparities is one of the Board's priority policy areas and working with the Tribes is necessary to eliminate AI/AN health disparities. Joe Finkbonner is the Board's lead in this work, as well as being a past AIHC chair. Marianne Seifert is the Board's health disparities staff person.

Four ideas were selected to propose at January 9th Joint Meeting:

Sue Crystal Indian Health Act

(Hon. Marilyn Scott, Chair AIHC and Chair Upper Skagit Tribe will present)

Request \$49,000 to fund joint SBOH/AIHC work to develop draft legislation and develop consensus for 2003 Legislature. The primary purpose of the legislation is to reduce health disparities and to improve access to health services for AI/AN. While the final scope of the Act will depend on the outcome of the work done over the next year, potential areas include:

- Research and remedy access problems created by RCW's and WAC's that do not adequately address needs AI/AN's and the Indian health system
- Codify Government to Government relationship between Washington State agencies and Tribes
- Identify specific methods to reduce health disparities for AI/AN
- Identify and propose specific mental health programs and initiatives
- Identify and propose chemical dependency programs and projects – (e.g. local basket and canoe projects).

The Tribal Leaders Health Summit (August/September 2002) would be used as a forum to discuss and refine the legislation as well as seek consensus and support.

Sue Crystal Annual Award to Recognize Leadership in Indian Health

(Cindy Lowe, Vice Chair AIHC, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe will present)

This non-monetary award (perhaps similar to the Warren Featherstone Reid award) would be established and awarded annually to an individual who excelled in the area of improving AI/AN health in Washington State.

Endowed Chair of Indian Health Policy

(Ralph Forquera, AIHC Executive Committee Member-at-Large, Seattle Indian Health Board will present)

Several people have expressed an interest in some type of endowment. Endowing a Chair of Indian Health Policy, probably at the Health Policy Analysis Program at the University of Washington, could help raise the awareness and responsiveness to AI/AN issues in state health policy research, discussion and activities. This position would also provide information about Indian health policy to UW faculty and students, mentor AI/AN and other students, and help attract more AI/AN students into the areas of health and policy. An endowment would create the opportunity for individuals, as well as Tribes, to contribute funding to support this activity.

Indian Seat (non-voting) in House and Senate

(Hon. Brian Cladoosby, Chair, Swinomish Tribe will present)

Several models exist for establishing a more effective voice for Indian issues in state legislatures. Often policy and legislation fail to consider unintended impacts on Tribal communities because they are poorly understood. Having a clearly defined Indian presence that represented Tribes in the legislature would provide legislators and staff with a credible and accessible resource for information and advice on Indian issues. The Tribal representative would be able to co-sponsor legislation that would benefit AI/AN individuals and Tribes.

Right now, it's our understanding that the final decision will require several more steps. These four ideas will be presented and discussed at the January 9th meeting.

Recommendations will be forwarded to state legislative staff for discussion and bill drafting. Senator Thibaudeau will have the final decision on what she will present. We will also need to be sure that AIHC and the Tribes are visible during the next session to support this memorial and Senator Thibaudeau's efforts.

In the meantime, please discuss this with your Tribal leadership and encourage someone from your Tribe to attend the January 9th Joint AIHC/SBOH meeting at Wa He Lut Indian School in Nisqually. AIHC will meet in the morning, lunch will be together with the school children and staff, and the joint meeting with the State Board of Health will be in the afternoon. If you have any questions or comments, please call Joe Finkbonner or Ed Fox at the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (503) 228-4185.